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ABSTRACT

This paper comments on three aspects of the educational reform movement in America: the current reform movement's aims and goals, community collaborations to assist systemic reform, and problems in pedagogy associated with school reform. An important accomplishment of the movement included collaborative partnerships among the corporate community, higher educational community, political agencies, and parents. Unfortunately, reform leaders threatened drastic consequences for comprehensive failure--an action that traumatized teachers, children, and parents. Education research was also adversely affected in that well-intentioned reform efforts were based on politics and uninformed social advocates instead of research-based investigations and results. The Pasadena College of Teachers is an example of educational collaboration where teacher members were selected from different school levels to modify principles and practices of instructional delivery within the Pasadena School District. Educators took responsibility for their professional growth and influenced instructional policy by collaborating with administrators, the union, and university faculty. Results are promising in that teachers have improved their quality of professionalism and grant funding has been obtained. It is recommended that the educational sciences, and principles and practices of educational research, be inserted into every school-change agenda to prevent tinkering by well-intentioned but uninformed social advocates. (Contains 25 endnotes.) (RT)

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Tokyo Gakugei University Symposium
March 17, 2001
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Visiting Professor, Curriculum Center

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Introduction

After 18 years of educational reform in the United States since the 1983 report, *A Nation at Risk*, appeared under the Reagan administration, some achievements have been recorded [1]. In this paper, I want to comment on three major aspects of this reform movement:

1) The current reform movement's aims and goals[2].

2) Community collaborations to assist systemic reform. Here the focus of the discussion is a description of collaboration in the Pasadena Unified School District.

and

3) Pedagogy – teaching and learning problems associated with school reform.

Systemic Educational Reform

Foremost among the accomplishments of the current reform movement was the recommendation for and establishment of varied school and community partnerships or collaborations[3]. These collaborations found the corporate community, the higher education community, political agencies, and parents, among others working together to reform public education[4]. Collaborative partnerships are illustrative of the quality of educational change accomplished through citizen cooperation[5].

However, there is a down side to educational reform. As reform leaders threaten drastic consequences for comprehensive failure; children, teachers, and parents experienced excessive and unjustified terrors.

The educational reform movement scathed teachers[6]. At the beginning of the current educational reform movement, national news publications, and local, state, and federal officials seemingly conspired to identify teachers as the primary culprit in the decline of public education[7]. Educational researcher, Diana Rigden, in a 1996 survey, found that teachers have little or no input in the direction of the profession. Her survey indicated that highly experienced and exemplary teachers were asked very little about their ideas concerning educational reform[8].

In 1996, the *Report of the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future* noted, "(O) n the whole the school reform movement has ignored the obvious: What teachers know and can do makes the crucial difference in what children learn[9]." It took 13 years from the time of *A Nation at Risk* to the report *Teaching and America's Future* for reformers to recognize that teachers are the most critical component of student success[10]. Since John Goodlad's work, studies on the difference teachers make in the academic achievement of children support the intuitive notion that teachers are critical partners in teaching and learning[11•12].

The reform movement terrorized parents with the threat of school takeovers by the state government. Bureaucratic takeover of schools became a reality in California when Compton Unified School District was placed in receivership by the state. This action effectively ended local control of schools as previously held, by parents residing in this community.

During the last eighteen years of school reform, the threat of voter approved educational vouchers, which severely limit low-income parents' options for their children's education, has gained in national popularity among voters.

Ironically, educational reformers championed development of school collaborations and simultaneously traumatized teachers, students, and parents. However, despite the positive outcomes of reform and despite the harm shed on teachers, students, and parents, there is one arena severely affected by the educational reform movement – educational research.

The discipline of education underwent attacks by reformers taking factual and research based findings from *A Nation at Risk*, and converting these objective results into a movement that shook the profession to its core. Years of systemic reform have shown that much of the reform effort was unconnected to existing research on educational change. I am suggesting now we usher in a new period in education. A period that I will call, collaboration for educational change.

Research-based investigations and their results should be the principal tool with which to implement school change. By coupling research with preK-12 collaborations similar to those described above, educational change should proceed in an orderly fashion without generating negative outcomes described earlier.

Collaborations represent one of the most significant outcomes of recent educational reform that can lead to long-term systemic change in teaching and learning. The organization of these partnerships shows a promising practice leading to educational change[13]. I would now like to share with you my work as a member of a professional development collaboration that contributed to positive change in teaching and learning in the Pasadena Unified School District.

Collaboration – The College of Teachers

Despite concerns that in their initial stages, school collaborations can be time-consuming to establish, partnerships for educational change are exciting[14]. I had the pleasure of working for five years as a member of a team of educators in an urban school district collaborating to improve professional development activities for teachers[15].

This collaboration had several partners come together in an attempt to modify principles and practices of instructional delivery within the district. Partners established the Professional Development Center to address professional development needs of the instructional staff. Teacher members of the team were selected from elementary, junior high, and high schools representing a specific demographic area within the Pasadena School District. Teachers from these "school families" contributed mightily to shaping professional development activities in the district.

At our first meeting in 1997, the 12-person team including teachers, a district administrator, the teacher union chief, a principal, and California State University faculty, named itself the "College of Teachers." The title signified the vision of teachers taking responsibility for their professional growth. These teacher leaders felt that they could significantly influence instructional policy by collaborating with administrators, the union, and university faculty.

The leadership role envisioned by the College of Teachers Steering Committee provided district teachers with an avenue to express professional opinions on instructional strategies[16]. The vision also found teachers taking responsibility for training fellow teachers in different stages of their careers. Some experienced teachers in the

district would serve as adjunct faculty teaching several courses in pedagogy to beginning teachers, while others would serve as mentors. The College of Teachers continues to exude a spirit of cooperation among colleagues that enhances the overall quality of professionalism in the district through the highly visible role teachers take in organizing and delivering professional growth seminars.

From 1997 until 2001, the Ford Foundation contributed approximately $463,000 in support of the Pasadena Project. Funding responsibilities will shift to the district and other partners after the end of the Ford commitment.

The Pasadena collaboration joined a broader coalition of three schools from two other school districts. Another private organization, The Weingart Foundation funded these school families for $8,325,000. Similar steering committees as found in Pasadena formed at the three other school sites.

Finally, an overseeing agency, Design Linking Teaching and Achievement (DELTA), monitored progress, assisted in the evaluation, and performed various other organizational tasks in support of each of the school families[17].

Collaborative efforts by members of a community to effect school change have proven to be a viable strategy. Not all partnerships work. There is a great deal of effort necessary to build trust and a positive working environment among partners. Nonetheless, despite challenges, opportunities that collaborations hold for improving teaching and learning are worth the energy to try. However, the energy and cost to initiate and establish educational reform may not be cost effective[18].

The End of Reform?

The concept of "reform" might have limited application in the field of education. "Reform" is a term best suited for major and pragmatic upheavals in education and other sciences. Infrequently, we hear of mathematical reform (cf. Galileo). Seldom do we hear of geological reform. Indeed, in the sciences, reforming our way of thinking about phenomena is rare. Rarely do we intend to dismantle years of thinking about how a discipline operates without some very strong and convincing evidence. Not so with educational reform.

The discipline of education is subject to reform movements because of its highly visible public image. Unlike mathematics, geology, sociology, the educator has always a major portion of their agenda being in public view. Therefore, while no one may have a strong interest in what the mathematician may do, there is not the same disinterest among the public when it comes to education.

Systematic reform meant reconceptualizing national, state, and local educational policies. Student achievement, funding policies, salaries, testing, schools of education, parental participation, school site management, and teacher accountability all came under the scrutiny and review of educational reformers.

Oftentimes, educational reform is accompanied by dramatic social upheaval. Indeed the complete title of *A Nation at Risk* is "*A Nation at Risk* –***The Imperative for Reform***." When the commission responsible for the report issued its findings, that then should have been the first step in decreasing usage of the term reform. Instead, national and international hysteria took hold. It became commonplace to read and hear of leftwing

and rightwing educational reform in several countries. Could China, Sweden, and Israel all be experiencing a similar educational malaise as that identified for the United States in the Holmes Report?

Educational reform begs the question of how we will recognize once we have reformed education. Well-respected educational researcher, Robert Slavin suggests that:

> Whatever impact ... years of systemic reform may have had or may have in the future, there is a limit to what can be achieved in education reform unless the reforms can improve the methods and materials every teacher uses with every student, in every subject, every day[19].

It appears that Slavin recognizes the idea of reform could be never ending yet he contributes to the seemingly endless stream of educational reform by advocating a new type of reform that he calls "comprehensive reform[20]."

Now, if there is indeed another stage in the educational reform movement, I would suggest it address responsible public advocacy for educational change. Before any political candidate runs for office on a platform advocating educational reform I would ask that he or she take a standardized examination on "Life in Schools." In particular, I would like them to take a sub-section called "Life in Urban Schools." If the candidate "passes" the examination with a minimal score, and after having spent thirty days in an urban school, they are then allowed to draft legislation designed to improve teaching and learning.

What indicators would we have in place to suggest that reform will have occurred and thus there would be no more need for reform? Will the reform become normal practice? Does there come a time when we are reforming the reforms?

Certainly, student achievement issues, central to educational reform movement concerns needed addressing. The fact of the matter was that in most cases educational researchers were thoughtfully examining them[21].

For example, authors of the Glenn Report on science and mathematics achievement note that for thirty years, studies indicated that US students are falling behind the rest of the industrialized world in mathematics and science education. The authors remind the readers that nothing substantial has been done in those thirty years to rectify problems of student achievement despite research identifying the slow and steady decline of mathematics and science research. Only now, during the current educational reform movement, do they believe that their calls for assistance may be heard.

Educational research, not educational reform should be the vehicle for managing school change[22]. Reformers and reform plans come and go. The discipline of education must not be allowed to change under the whip of reform.

Conclusion

Thirty years ago, I began a career in teaching. English was the first class taught. That first experience was not as successful as I would have liked.

While struggling to become a better teacher, I noticed that the school itself was overrun by social malaise. There was violence. Parents of the school children were not accommodated. Many of the teachers did not want to be there. Many were teaching in areas outside of their expertise. Many students did not want to be there.

From that experience, I decided to learn more of how schools work. In 1972, I traveled three thousand miles to the west, to attend graduate school at UCLA. While an education graduate student, I taught high school in Los Angeles.

My initial reactions to the differences in school climate between the public schools in Los Angeles and those I left in Philadelphia were of amazement. Overall, the quality of the instructional facilities, student-teacher interaction, student life, and other salient features of schooling were far superior to that of many schools seen in Philadelphia. Unfortunately, after 29 years in Los Angeles I notice that the schools have generally come to resemble the type, I had seen in Philadelphia several years earlier.

Since 1970, I have seen the spread of urban school decline across the United States. Now that I have crossed the Pacific, I see once again evidence of urban school malaise.

Today I am in Japan. Today I hear stories of school violence, ijime (bullying), and gangs. Today I hear of teachers not wanting to work with minority children. Today I hear that the Japanese public does not have the respect for education they once had.

Some thirty years ago, I began a career in education. In this time, I witnessed the gradual decline of schooling in large metropolitan areas. Many of the citizens in these metropolitan areas represent ethnic, racial, language, economic, and cultural minorities.

The education for minority populations is in need of significant improvement. Despite promising practices[23], commitment to improving the education for minorities worldwide will require the fervor seen in the general reform movement in the United States and elsewhere[24]. It will also require forthright and bold political action. A broad based civic action involving collaboration among the infrastructure of a community – public safety, sanitation, social work, traffic, and other agencies need to see that the schools in their neighborhoods meet high expectations.

School reform advocates never discuss reform of the private school. Nor do they speak of reforming schools in upper income neighborhoods. Yet, these schools must

respond to many mandated reforms. Educational practices in these schools typically evolve with sound pedagogical principles. The roots of educational reform have not taken hold in large urban school districts. We need to ask why.

I believe that much of the rationale for the current educational reform movement is based on a misunderstanding of pedagogy. The tempest of reform elicited wave after wave of legislation and public outcry for change that ultimately provided little opportunity to take an objective and studied look at educational problems now demanding the public's attention. In the current reform climate a historical view of educational change is lost.

Educators must immediately serve notice that our discipline is alert to changes occurring in the field and that we have research resources to respond. Educators need to be forceful and resist well-intentioned tinkering with our principles and practices by benign but uninformed social advocates. I am suggesting that we steadfastly insert the educational sciences, the principles, and practices of educational research into every school change agenda. In so doing, university Schools of Education should establish centers of **functional intersection.** Here a group of faculty should collaborate with colleagues within and without the discipline on solving immediate educational issues, especially those related to urban school change. The faculty at Gakugei's Curriculum Center is equipped to make an immediate impact on school change agendas[25].

Most importantly, all involved in the orderly transfer of those ideas/concepts/issues that each culture finds worthy, should understand that education is a unique discipline of inquiry. Pedagogy cannot determine a "best way" to educate each student. Unlike the physical sciences in which measurements are presumably more exact, educational change

involves humans in artistic and scientific problem solving. The discipline is not amenable to deterministic theorizing and answers.

The current wave of reform cast many adults, children, and the discipline itself in a very poor light. The current wave of reform should end. Now is the time for educators to recaptivate the imagination, faith, and spirit of all humankind through demonstrating effective pedagogical practices that lead our youth to their highest potential.

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[1] A Nation at Risk, National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983.
[2] Robert Slavin defines systemic reform as changes in standards, assessments, accountability, governance (charters and vouchers), and funding plans. Putting the School Back in School Reform, Educational Leadership, December 2000/ January 2001, pp.22 -27.
[3] Jill F. Russell and Richard B. Flynn, Setting the Stage for Collaboration, Peabody Journal of Education, 75(3), 1-5, 200.
[4] Ibid
[5] Chase Manhattan Bank Foundation, The Ford Foundation, The Annenberg Foundation, The Kellogg Foundation Chevron USA; Exxon Education Foundation; and the GE Fund are but a few of the organizations supporting educational change.
[6] Reginald G. Damerell, Education's Smoking Gun: How Teachers Colleges have Destroyed Education in America (New York: Freundlich Books, 1985).
[7] Kate Zernike," Less Training, More Teachers: New Math for Staffing Classes," New York Times, August 24, 2000.
[8] Diana Wyllie Rigden, What Teachers Have to Say About Teacher Education, Perspective, Council for Basic Education, Vol. 8, No. 1, Fall 1996.
[9] What Matters Most: Teaching for America's Future, Summary Report, Report of the National Commission & America's Future, September, 1996.
[10] John Goodlad's, Teachers for Our Nation's Schools, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1990, is a notable exception to the general perception of teacher ineffectiveness during the initial phase of reform.
[11] Rivkin, S.G., Hanushek, E.A., & Kain, J.F. Teachers, Schools, and Academic Achievement. National Bureau of Economic Research, Working Paper Number 6691, 1998.
[12] W.L. Sanders& J.C. Rivers Cumulative and residual effects of Teachers on Future Academic Achievement, University of Tennessee Value-Added Research and Assessment Center, 1996.
[13] Russell and Flynn provide 10 examples of various collaborations
[14] Op cit. Russell and Flynn
[15] A complete description of the project can be found on the LAAMP website www.laampinfo@laamp.org
[16] Diana Wyllie Rigden, What Teachers Have to Say About Teacher Education, Perspective, Council for Basic Education, Vol.8, No.1, Fall 1996.
[17] Visit the DELTA website (now found as a link in the LAAMP website) laampinfo@laamp.org
[18] Robert Donmoyer, editor: A Focus on Educational Reform and the Role of Research in the Reform Process, Educational Researcher, V. 25, N7, Oct. 1996. Several articles contained that present a discussion of the cost benefit analysis of school reform.
[19] Robert Slavin, Putting the School Back in School Reform, Educational Leadership, December, Jan. 2000, 2001 pp.22 -27.
[20] Ibid. Comprehensive reform considers the school as the unit of reform and "scaling up" effective schools until large numbers of schools are using more effective methods in line with state and national standards.
[21] Before It's Too Late: A Report to the Nation from the National Commission on Mathematics and Science Teaching for the 21st Century, The Glenn Commission Executive Summary, January 2001.

[22] D.W. Miller, Why do Academic Studies Play Such a Minimal Role in Efforts to Improve Schooling? Chronicle of Higher Education, Aug 6, 1999 pp. A17-A18.
[23] Success is measured on multiple academic and social scales.
[24] Roderick Paige, US Secretary of Education, No Child Left Behind: A Blueprint for Education Reform, Testimony at Senate Hearings on behalf of President Bush's educational policy. In his speech, the secretary states that the administration will focus reform efforts on poor and minority children.
[25] UCLA's Center X is a possible model of functional intersection wherein faculty shares their expertise across a variety of subject fields www.centerx.gseis.ucla.edu